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30 March 1987Pollard affair: A damaging setback for U.S.-Israeli relations

Hiring of Jonathan Pollard, left, is denounced in Israel by U.S. Jewish leader Morris Abram

The spy who came between friends

■ Squabbles erupt in the closest of families. But the spat that began with the 1985 arrest of Jonathan Pollard for selling U.S. military secrets to Israel has flared into a divisive confrontation between American Jewry and Israeli political leaders.

The barrage of criticism leveled at Jerusalem last week following Pollard's guilty plea and life sentence is unprecedented in nearly four decades of close emotional bonding between Israel and U.S. Jews. Says prominent Jewish leader Morris Abram: "It is a serious problem. The damage is deep."

Critics condemn Israel for three major blunders—official culpability in running the spy ring, promotions for the two principal spy handlers and dismissal of Washington's national-security concerns.

Jerusalem's stonewalling left U.S. officials seething. Scores of prominent American Jews were moved to suspend the 11th commandment of Jewish communal life: Never criticize Israel publicly. Some 65 members of various Jewish organizations flew to Jerusalem and—using words such as "grievous," "stupid," "arrogant"—delivered the first ever public tongue-lashing of elected Israeli leaders.

No one expects a rupture in official ties, and America's annual \$3 billion in military and economic aid to its most vital Mideast ally remains secure. But the unique U.S.-Israeli relationship has been dealt a damaging blow,

and it faces a lengthy period of reassessment and healing. American Jewish leaders and lawmakers fear that the Pollard affair has eroded the unswerving popular support Israel has long enjoyed on Capitol Hill and among the public.

Facade of restraint

While members of Congress are wagging fingers and tempering criticism with judicious political restraint, privately they are stamping their feet and expressing outrage. "The Israelis handled it abysmally," complained one Jewish member of the House of Representatives. "They didn't even begin to comprehend the enormity of what was

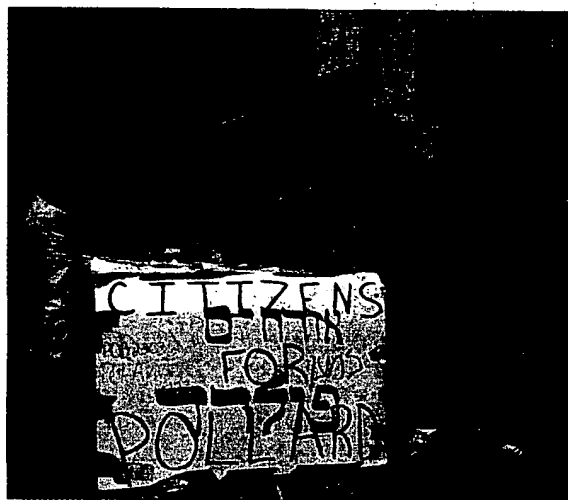
involved. They had to be hit, repeatedly, over the head with a 2-by-4 by American Jews."

The implications of the Pollard affair are being debated throughout the fractious Jewish community, which—on this issue at least—is reacting with something akin to unanimity. "Stupid" is the common assessment of Israel's espionage. Whatever benefit Israel derived from Pollard's information, it was widely felt, will be offset by negative consequences.

While there is little concern of a rise in overt anti-Semitism, many worry about more-subtle forms of discrimination. Will Israel's recruitment of an American Jew to spy on his own country cause people to question the patriotism of other Jews?

One minor, but telling, incident underscored this fear last week in Washington. Two senior government officials who are employed by the same agency discovered that each had been called in for a routine security review. Among the unusual questions asked of these Jews: Do you attend synagogue? Do your children go to Hebrew school?

"The effect of the Pollard case will be felt not only in the government



People in Jerusalem sign petitions on Pollard's behalf

Continued

bureaucracy but in corporate boardrooms," believes Jerry Lippman, publisher of the weekly *Long Island Jewish World*. "People will say: 'You can't bring Jews inside a company. Jews can't be trusted with secrets.'"

While the affair is not expected to erode financial and emotional support from its American Jewish constituency, Israel's perceived duplicity has prompted Jewish critics to vent long-suppressed frustrations with the country's current political leadership.

Where Israel was once guided by the likes of David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, many American Jews today see a country poorly served by a bickering troika of politicians who command only perfunctory respect.

The collective predicament of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is likened to that of Richard Nixon hunkered down in his Watergate White House, besieged by critics seeking answers.

"This has been the best [Washington] administration for Jews and Israel," asserts David Korn, a retired professor and former State Department official. "But Israeli leaders have been incredibly stupid and arrogant. They think they can get away with everything." In Washington Rabbi David Saperstein's view: "Israel compromised both American Jewry and Israel. The image of Israeli leaders running roughshod over American, and ultimately Israeli, interests is alarming."

No more spies in the U.S.

In Jerusalem, Shamir continued to shrug off responsibility for what he insists was a "rogue operation" outside normal intelligence channels. But he also began the hard business of closing the rift. "This is a painful episode—a tragedy in every respect," Shamir acknowledged. "There is a need for a lowering of the temperature, for a calmer atmosphere." He assured Washington that Israel has no more agents ferreting for American secrets because, he insisted, "it is our policy not to spy in the United States."

While Shamir's contrition was designed to assuage critics, the effort was immediately undermined. The two men who allegedly recruited and directed Pollard—veteran spy Rafael Eitan and Air Force Col. Aviem Sella, who is now under U.S. indictment—testified before an inquiry panel in Tel Aviv that they acted with official approval, directly contradicting the government's claim of a rogue operation.

Under their direction, Pollard, a U.S. Navy counterintelligence analyst, copied more than 1,000 top-secret documents and sold them to Israel. The trove

'This is a painful episode— a tragedy in every respect'

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir

included aerial-reconnaissance photographs, descriptions of covert intelligence operations and the identities of undercover agents. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said he could conceive of "no greater harm to national security" than the disclosure of the secrets. While insisting that his only motivation was to aid Israel, Pollard was paid about \$50,000 in cash, which he and his wife used to finance lavish overseas trips.

While the censure and broadsides from American Jews forced Shamir and his colleagues to adopt a more concilia-

ments—a reference to the Israeli government—had funneled \$80,000 to a Washington lawyer who represents Pollard.

As the week progressed, the rhetoric flying back and forth between America and Israel began cooling. "There's an opportunity here to rethink the entire relationship between American Jewry and Israel," proffered Yitzhak Livne, a former Israeli Army commander. "It's a catastrophic opportunity, but an opportunity nonetheless."

"Mutual interests"

Jewish leaders in the U.S. also were confident that the basic kinship would be strengthened after a period of adjustment. "The essential relationship between Israel and the U.S. is based on mutual interests, and it will not change," believes Stuart Lewengrub,

A VIEW FROM ISRAEL



"Everyone covering up for everyone" says a Jerusalem newspaper of Foreign Minister Peres, Prime Minister Shamir, Defense Minister Rabin

tory pose—including a ban on new arms sales to South Africa—the criticism triggered a backlash among Israelis who angrily evoked images of an American Dreyfus affair and carped about a lack of commitment to the Jewish state.

They bitterly denounced their American brethren for not supporting Pollard, viewed by many Israelis as a Jew serving a higher cause. An ad hoc support group began soliciting funds to help pay legal bills.

Israeli radio reported that "state ele-

southeastern director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. The sentiment was echoed by Detroit Rabbi Irwin Groner. "Trust and cooperation and shared support for human values have marked the linkage and will be affirmed," he says. "This is an episode, an aberration but not a rupture of that relationship."

by Michael Satchell with Charles Fenyvesi and Andy Plattner in Washington, Robert Rosenberg in Tel Aviv and bureau reports